

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003204

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR R, P, EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/26/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: COMBATING EXTREMISM

REF: (A) STATE 1591219 (B) ROME 3137 (C) ROME 2594

(D) MILAN 422

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Spogli, for reasons 1.4(b)(d)

1. (C) Summary. Post welcomes the opportunity to strengthen programs to combat extremism, and we believe European posts have an important role to play in reaching out to Muslim audiences. To accomplish this long-term objective, we propose an outreach program aimed at Italian citizens and immigrants (legal and illegal) to: (a) convince Italians of the need for immigrant integration as the best means to prevent a repeat of the London bombings scenario; (b) share with immigrants America's message of religious, and racial/ethnic tolerance; and, (c) convince the silent, moderate majority of Muslims in Italy to speak out against extremism. Washington's support in coordinating increased financial and program resources across regional and functional bureaus would significantly enhance this effort. End Summary.

Audience: Citizens and Immigrants  
-----

2. (C) In Italy, our audience includes citizens and immigrants (legal and illegal) who have different concerns and may require different forms of outreach. The phenomenon of immigration is relatively new in Italy, which until recently has been a country of emigrants. As Italy's immigrant population grows to meet economic demand, today's predominately Catholic society will be increasingly challenged to integrate a population from countries with different religious, racial/ethnic and socio-cultural traditions. Italians are far behind their counterparts in France or the UK in beginning the debate over integration. While the Government pays lip service to the concept, integration programs are implemented sporadically by regional and municipal governments, and there is a wide disparity in attitudes between the South (generally more tolerant) and the North (generally less tolerant).

3. (C) Muslims comprise approximately two percent of the population. The majority are moderates; only five percent of Muslims in Italy attend mosque; and many are itinerant workers (see Ref B for additional information). The Italian Government closely monitors this community and expels those who preach violence (Ref D). Following the London bombings, the Government began a crackdown on immigrants, so the community is now wary of special attention from outsiders, and this may complicate our outreach effort. We are building our information base about Italy's diverse Muslim community to determine the best ways of stimulating a dialogue with them. We do not believe that political or public diplomacy outreach programs are an effective means to reach Muslim extremists themselves; this task is best left to other agencies with other tools.

Message: The American Immigrant Experience  
-----

4. (C) Ref A suggests that creating a climate of open debate will deter extremism. We note that Italians have a tradition of open intellectual exchange and tolerance of other faiths. They also have a history that includes Fascism, a continuing anarchist movement and the violent legacy of the Red Brigades. The conservative Catholic Opus Dei organization remains active, and anti-Semitic graffiti still exists in places throughout the country. Some extremist Islamic cells do exist, taking advantage of an open society to provide logistical and financial support to international terrorist groups. Extremist thought which generates violent terrorist actions, however, is not a major problem in Italy.

5. (C) The issue here is not one of intellectual freedom but of convincing Italians that integration of a growing Muslim immigrant population is the best way to avoid a repeat of the London bombings scenario. It is also important to encourage the silent, moderate Muslim majority to speak out against extremism. Therefore, we believe our message should be a broad one, based on traditional themes of religious tolerance, multi-culturalism and the American immigrant

experience.

¶6. (C) For native Italians, we should seek to help the Government develop effective integration and anti-discrimination programs. A good example of this effort

is a VolVis that will bring leaders from several European states to the U.S. to study how America integrates our immigrant population. We need to broaden this initiative to additional national, regional, and municipal leaders, and NGOs. To reduce to the extent possible misconceptions that generate discrimination, we will promote cultural exchanges in music and art that de-mystify Islam and Muslims.

¶7. (C) The often itinerant immigrant community, with its diverse geographic base and limited Italian language skills, presents more of a challenge. We are evaluating the viability of using schools, mosques, professional associations, municipal immigrant councils, unions and cultural/sports associations as possible channels through which we could promote our agenda. We will continue to distribute IIP materials and Washington File stories in Arabic to local communities and newsletters.

8, (C) To stimulate dialogue, we are proposing a conference on comparative immigrant integration to be held in conjunction with an Italian think tank. We will also deploy the Ambassador, who has a personal family story to share on the American immigrant experience, to universities and communities throughout Italy. We will distribute IIP materials and op-eds in Italian that highlight the success of America's religious and cultural diversity. And we will deploy U.S. speakers to explain how Islam and other religions thrive in America. Exchange programs continue to be the best long-term tool for promoting understanding of America and its diversity.

Resources: Coordination Across Bureaus Needed

¶9. (C) We believe the initiative to combat extremism will be more successful if Washington coordinates increased financial and program support across functional and regional bureaus to better utilize limited resources. For example, European posts must compete with NEA for a limited pool of U.S. Arabic speakers. IVP programs in each country currently are aimed only at citizens of that country; we applaud recent efforts to widen opportunities for Muslims, but more is needed. Our resources (and MPP goals) currently are aimed at fighting terrorism (from a law enforcement perspective), not extremism per se, and we will have to divert resources from current programs to address extremism.

Italian Government Efforts

¶10. (U) Public debate, intellectual or otherwise, is not lacking in Italy. Neither is public education, although the issue of access to school (particularly Islamic/Arabic instruction) and other government resources for immigrants is a growing issue. There is little hate speech; post works with NGOs to monitor anti-Semitism, which exists primarily in the form of swastika graffiti. We do not have the resources to monitor websites or racist propaganda that may emanate from Italian internet sites.

¶11. (U) Responsibility for religious affairs, immigrant integration and anti-discrimination is shared by the Ministry of Equal Opportunity, the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, the Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister's office, which has a special Advisor for Religious Affairs. In 2004, the Government created an Office to Combat Racial and Ethnic Discrimination; it maintains a hot line to accept complaints and provides legal assistance to victims. Also in 2004, the Berlusconi Government created an inter-ministerial Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism and Italy chaired the International Task Force on Holocaust Education. Following the London bombings, the Government enacted a tougher anti-terrorism law (Ref C) that enabled increased wiretaps, speedy expulsion of terrorism suspects and the holding of suspects without charge for 24 hours. In September, the Minister of Interior created a new Italian Muslim Council to promote outreach, although political opposition may prevent it from becoming a reality. There are hundreds of Italian NGOs that promote democracy, religious tolerance, and human rights.

Current/Pending Programs:

¶12. (U) Mission Italy is utilizing a combination of our U.S. Speakers and Exchange programs together with Embassy resources to promote our agenda. Examples include:

--Speaker: Georgetown Imam Yaya Hendi, for Ramadan Program

--Ramadan Iftars (hosted by Ambassadorial and PolMinCoun/PAO)

--Speakers: Conference: "Politics and Religion: Is there a Transatlantic Divide?"

--Ambassadorial Speech: "The American Immigrant Experience"

--Planned Rome PA Conference in cooperation with an Italian think tank: "Immigration and Integration: Islam in America/Islam in Europe"

--IVP nominees:

Darif Aziz, Cultural Guide and Mediator, Islamic Cultural Center of Rome

Khalid Chaouki, Commentator for Corriere del Mezzogiorno newspaper

Izzedin Elzir, President of the Muslim Community of Florence

Yaya Sergio Pallavicini, VP, Italian Islamic Religious Community

Anwar Al Joulani, Principal, Arab-Libyan School Milan

Souad Sbei, Journalist, Moroccan community of Rome leader

--IVLP: an innovative three-person group, including Muslim, Catholic and Jewish community leaders to participate in an interfaith program

--VolVis: Immigration and Integration Issues for Ministry of Welfare official w/European colleagues

--VolVis: Mohamed Saady, President, ANOLF immigrant program for the CISL Italian union

--Rome Public Affairs also supports programming by the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, which has an extensive program for promoting religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue.

SPOGLI

NNNN

2005ROME03204 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL